

in the White House Tribal Nations Conference. President Barack Obama has committed to placing American Indian issues at the center of his administration, and the multiday conference was an important testament to the President's pledge to involve American Indian people in constructive dialogue. The conference allowed leaders from the 564 federally recognized tribes to interact directly with the President and representatives from the highest levels of the administration. The tribal leaders in attendance displayed the very diverse face of Indian Country. Each individual tribe forms a distinctive chapter of the American Indian story, yet the narrative contains many common themes of triumph and tragedy.

President Bill Clinton hosted the first tribal nations conference at the White House in 1994. It is not without precedent that President Obama invited leaders from all federally recognized tribes; however, I believe that this year's event is unmatched in its potential for progress. President Obama has charged each Cabinet agency with delivering a detailed plan of how to improve tribal consultation and how to address the complex challenges facing Indian Country. This Congress, with the leadership of President Obama, has an exceptional opportunity to improve the quality of life for American Indian tribes by consulting with tribal leaders and focusing on tribal sovereignty and the empowerment of Indian communities. For far too long, American Indians have endured a drastically underfunded health care system, crumbling education facilities, dismal economic prospects, and a subpar standard of living. It is essential to address this erosive cycle of poverty and marginalization in a thoughtful manner.

The diversity of American Indian tribes reflects the vibrant origins of our Nation. As the First Americans, sound American Indian policy is a precursor to our Nation's capacity to evolve and progress in an ever changing, diversifying society. We need to celebrate the proud ancestry and incredible sacrifices of American Indians. National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month reminds us to promote diversity rather than suppress it, as diverse values and cultures erect the foundation of the United States.

American Indians contributed to the formation of modern political institutions as tribal confederacies influenced the foundations of early American democracy. In every conflict since the Revolutionary War, tribal members have courageously sacrificed their lives to help defend and preserve these democratic ideals. As the Federal Government works to assert a modern environmental ethic that can address climate change and natural resource scarcity, we have much to learn from American Indian communities. The environmental consciousness inherent in tribal culture promotes conservation

and sustainability. American Indian communities have demonstrated that society can thrive and prosper without destroying the natural environment.

I hope this month provides students with the opportunity to explore the Thanksgiving story from the American Indian point of view. Observance of National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month reaffirms this Nation's respect for American Indian people. I encourage everyone to participate in our celebration of American Indians. I would like to pay tribute to the more than 65,000 American Indians in South Dakota whose heritage enriches our communities. While the month of November serves as an important testament to American Indian culture, it is critical to make a daily commitment to advancing the quality of life of American Indians, in order for our Nation to walk forward with strength and purpose.

#### NATIONAL SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE DAY

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize Saturday, November 21, as National Survivors of Suicide Day. National Survivors of Suicide Day is a day of healing for those who have lost someone to suicide. In 1999, a Senate resolution created this annual event behind the efforts of Senator HARRY REID, who lost his father to suicide. This year, on November 21, over 230 conferences will take place internationally to allow survivors of suicide to connect with others who have experienced the tragedy of suicide loss.

The statistics about suicide are deeply concerning. In our Nation, suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death for all ages. Among young adults ages 15–24, there are approximately 100–200 attempts for every completed suicide. Suicide takes the lives of approximately 30,000 Americans each year, and a person dies by suicide about every 16 minutes. Suicide is an epidemic that tears families and communities apart, and we must do all that we can to prevent it.

A suicide survivor is an individual who has lost someone to suicide. It is estimated that for each suicide, seven other lives are altered forever because of the death. Every year, approximately 200,000 people become survivors due to this tragic loss of life. Many suicide survivors are left devastated, confused and weakened by their loss. Friends and family often experience depression, guilt, shock and anger. Unfortunately, there remains a stigma surrounding suicide and mental illness, and victims often shoulder some of the blame.

South Dakota is among a group of Western States that consistently has a higher rate of suicide than the rest of the country. The suicide rate for American Indians ages 15–34 is more than two times higher than the national average and is the second leading cause of death for this age group. The loss of

these young people is a real crisis. We must provide tribes with the resources they need to implement culturally sensitive suicide prevention programs. It is critical to strengthen the social fabric to help improve mental health. On American Indian reservations in South Dakota, I have seen the catastrophic ripple effect that one suicide can have. Given the alarming occurrence of "suicide clusters" and imitative deaths that have occurred in Indian Country this year, it is imperative to provide support for those left behind.

I hope that National Suicide Survivors Day is an opportunity to promote the broad based support that each survivor deserves. We are not doing enough to fight this tragic epidemic that is taking the lives of so many in our communities. We must concentrate our efforts on addressing the root causes of suicide in Indian Country and throughout the Nation. It is critical to expand access to mental health services, including a focus on education, prevention and intervention. Furthermore, we need to acknowledge the obstacles that suicide survivors face during their grieving and encourage the involvement of survivors in healing activities and prevention programs. This is one of the goals of the South Dakota Strategy for Suicide Prevention. Finally, I believe that with appropriate support and treatment, suicide survivors can lead effective advocacy efforts to eliminate stigma and reduce the incidence of suicide.

#### AMERICAN DIABETES MONTH

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I wish today to recognize November as American Diabetes Month. National studies estimate 23.6 million Americans live with diabetes, and nearly one-quarter of this population has not yet been diagnosed. The number of South Dakotans living with diabetes has doubled since 1998, with more than 39,000 adults diagnosed as diabetics in 2008 and an estimated 10,000 not yet diagnosed.

American Diabetes Month focuses on increasing awareness of the disease, strengthening prevention efforts, and identifying associated health risks. The disease carries with it an increased rate of heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, kidney disease, blindness, and amputation of the lower extremities, among other associated health problems. For the past few decades, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has steadily increased nationwide, increasing the prevalence of type 2 diabetes. As the prevalence of diabetes increases, we are beginning to understand the costs to both our citizens' health and to our economy. The high costs to our government in direct medical and indirect costs of lost productivity, coupled with the personal costs of rising health care coverage and treatment, make type 2 diabetes control and prevention a national priority.